



Addressing the Crisis: The Stuart Hall Project

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Editor's Introduction

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

DEBORAH ELIZABETH WHALEY

Gramsci insisted that we get the 'organic' and 'conjunctural' aspects of the crisis into a proper relationship. What defines the 'conjunctural' - the immediate terrains of struggle - is not simply the given economic conditions, but precisely the 'incessant and persistent' efforts, which are being made to defend and conserve the position. If the crisis is deep - 'organic' - these efforts cannot be merely defensive. They will be formative: a new balance of forces, the emergence of new elements, the attempt to put together a new 'historical bloc.'

—Stuart Hall, *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*

The genesis of *Addressing the Crisis* arose from the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies comparative ethnic studies working group, which was composed of a critical mass of faculty at the University of Iowa. I began the working group in 2011, to provide a place and space for those working in comparative ethnic studies, especially those doing comparative work in Latinx, Asian American, Black American, and critical whiteness studies. In 2016, we were inspired by Duke University Press's book series on Stuart Hall, and the previous role the University of Iowa played in the construction of the special issue on Hall in *Communication Inquiry* (1986) and the often cited and taught book *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies: Stuart Hall* (1996). Seeds for the former journal issue and book began from a conference held at the University of Iowa. Its editors, David Morely and Kuan-Hsing Chen, write in the introduction to *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* about the collaborative role the University of Iowa played in this pivotal moment in cultural studies:

In 1985, Stuart Hall was invited, as Ida Beam Professor, to deliver a series of lectures on the University of Iowa campus. Intrigued by his 'passion, intensity and intellectual generosity', the *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, organized by graduate students of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication [at the University of Iowa], decided to devote a Special

Issue of their journal to Stuart Hall, in recognition of his long-term contribution in opening up spaces for critical scholarship. That Special Issue was edited by Kuan-Hsing Chen. It was clear that the task was not naively to celebrate the work of a committed intellectual but rather to take the opportunity to productively facilitate further 'critical dialogues' (Morely and Chen 1).

In honor of this earlier moment in Iowa's history and complimentary to a graduate course I teach at the University of Iowa on Stuart Hall, the comparative ethnic studies working group launched the Stuart Hall Collective. A diverse group of scholars across the UI's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, our charge was to re-immense ourselves in the pieces from Hall that inform our scholarship, teaching, advocacy, and cultural productions. We chose the newly published *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Writings* as our first reading, because it was published in 2016, which was a watershed moment in American politics and in the UK – a new, moving right show of great consequence for those committed to the flourishing of aggrieved communities in the US and abroad. We came together on 11 October 2017 at the Obermann Center to break bread and to – as Hall might say, think *deeply and profoundly* about the critical ideas and practices that limit us and those ideas and practices that have the possibility to *set us free*.

In the spirit of Hall and in the spirit of the UI's conference on Hall in the eighties, it was important for us to have students as a part of and central to our collective and to publish in the journal; these colleagues took our thinking and our creativity to critical heights. Scholars in history, anthropology, English, African American Studies, American Studies, women's, gender, and sexuality studies, sport studies, journalism and mass communication, and communication studies participated in the Stuart Hall Collective. After reading Hall's book of essays and discussing it in October 2017, a critical mass of us in the collective agreed to think through Hall's work as it applies to our own research and to write short pieces that would incorporate the ideas from *Political Writings* and other works by Hall through the moments, fields, and ideas that are of urgency to us and to our work. As leader of the working group, I began to strategize what form of publication these pieces might take, and during conversation with Tom Keegan, head of the Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio at the University Iowa, he made the suggestion to create an online journal to house the projects and to create a space of continual publication. Mark Anderson, librarian and Associate Editor of the journal, and graphic designer Alyssa Varner, also of the studio at the University of Iowa, helped to bring the project to life. Connor Hood, the public engagement specialist at the digital studio, worked to make sure a mass audience would see, read, and know about the project and its publication.

The pieces in our inaugural issue speak to the conjunctural moment – past, present, and future, in order to imagine new and better ways of being in the world. Through university studies, medievalist studies, sport studies, environmental studies, American Studies, and experimental film, our authors and an auteur create interventions in their fields. In each piece and as a collective, we aim to balance reflective, and rigorous ideas with the politics of everyday life. Loren Glass and I employ Stuart Hall's *Policing the Crisis* and moral panics as a jumping off place for "Addressing the Crisis: Mugging, Mobbing, and Memory Screens." Glass and I write about the irrational belief in the always-already marginal person as a violent threat, with attention to vigilante and state-sanctioned violence. We argue that to address policing, marginalization, and surveillance, it is necessary to address the fear that animates the process. Occurrences of policing and harassment in everyday life, on a national and international scale, leads us to see Hall as edifying for our current moment and he offers us new ways to imagine constituting, being with, and living with difference to the ends of transformation.

For Naomi Greyser, in "Far from Any Center: Articulating Race, Gender and Cultural Studies in the Neoliberal Academy," Stuart Hall's work on ideology and articulation informs what she identifies as key to critical inquiry and higher education flourishing. In so doing, she treats "cultural studies as an articulation to pose questions about what can be studied, spoken, written and taught in colleges and universities." Doris Witt's "Mediocre Meritocracy" continues this argument of critical inquiry by placing the crisis in higher education in conversation with the hopes of secondary education. Using her daughter's graduation from high school as an inspiration, she meditates on Hall's concern with the effects that a consumer driven society is having on education. Witt concludes that, "We do not need hereditary aristocracy [...] we need to throw ourselves beyond the limits of what exists and regain faith in our ability to transform our dreams of what could exist into reality." Given debates over free college admissions and what is now known as the US, 2019 "college admissions scandal," wherein affluent, white parents were found to pay their children's way in to college with false information, Greyser and Witt's ruminations on what and who the university is for is both poignant and emergent to social justice in education.

Greg Rosza beautifully narrates the tragic history of loss within his own family and connects this loss to environmental wins and losses for activists, writers, and the Western Shoshone in "Wrestling with Angels and Isotopes: It's Complicated." Rosza reminds us of Hall's insistence to speak and write autobiographically as a way of edifying his (and our) everyday connection to critical theory, which for some is mere abstraction without such narratives. Reflecting on his interdisciplinary training in American Studies, nuclear physics, engineering, and economics, as well as his work history in the sciences and Hall's commitment to malleable Marxist thought, he situates the importance of transnational

partnerships in environmental activism. The water crisis in Flint, Michigan, and the oil pipeline built through Standing Rock Sioux land, known as the Dakota Access Pipeline, underscores Rosza's call to collaborative activism. Black Americans, the economically disenfranchised, and indigenous nations people continue to struggle for the most basic of human rights: clean water. Our attention to his ideas and ability to connect the personal to the wider cultural as it pertains to climate change must concern us all, and lack of attention to this crisis, in ways that we are able, might very well make individual and community losses a global catastrophe.

Also working from a disciplinary base but expanding upon the established field of literary studies, Kathy Lavezzo unearths Stuart Hall's grounding in medievalist studies in her piece "'New' Ethnicities and Medieval 'Race.'" Lavezzo uses critical theories of race "to unpack medieval culture" and she argues that "the problem of racial fantasy extends back to the middle ages." She highlights Hall's attention to the cultural politics of representation as essential in earlier historical periods for which his work is under-utilized. Understanding the historical roots of how the Black body is narrated in visual, written, and cultural forms show us how and why representation still matters, as well as the ways in which these historical tropes and scripts inform our current conjuncture. Representation is at the heart of Chris Henderson, Thomas Oates, and Travis Vogan's extending of Hall's theorizing on neoliberalism in their piece "From Death to Spectacle: Football's Neoliberal Revolution." Working from a critical sport studies framework, they use the 1989 Hillsborough stadium crush to assert how "Hall helps sports scholars to grasp the cultural context of neoliberalism and ... how sport, as popular culture, both reflected and helped to maintain neoliberal power." Their accounting of spectacle and sport unearths the workings of the sport industrial complex and complements Hall's reading of the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," where he argues that we must recognize a power struggle within the popular culture of everyday life.

Film, like writing, can create a historic bloc that intervenes in systems of domination, either materially or ideologically. Auteur and writer Wylliam Smith's film *Powerless Small Town Hero* reveals the cultural work of experimental and guerilla (independent and slim budget) filmmaking. He visually narrates what it means to travel through space as a Black male, using himself as an example of a well-meaning, Black superhero, who faces a violent ending in a midwestern town. At a moment when Black superhero films such as *Black Panther* are amassing immense profit, Smith challenges spectators to consider if a heroic Black male can exist in the dominant imagination in the material world. We surely have "magical negroes" in the dominant imagination, that is, those anointed people of African descent who do not threaten the power base and are deemed palatable. Yet, how does the ways in which most Black people are viewed account for the state and

vigilante violence that Black people experience? Our post-Obama moment is a racialized backlash of magnanimous proportions. Smith thus asks the following in his artist statement: *In a world where Blackness is perceived as a threat, is it possible for a Black man to be a superhero? Powerless Small Town Hero* brings us full circle from the arguments of Glass and I in “Addressing the Crisis: Mugging, Mobbing, and Memory Screens.” Storytelling and theorizing in all our pieces allow us to make the ideas of Stuart Hall relevant to a wider public. The interdisciplinary nature of *Addressing the Crisis* invites scholars, artists, digital humanists, and activists working within and inspired by a variety of fields in conversation with Hall to join us in this work.

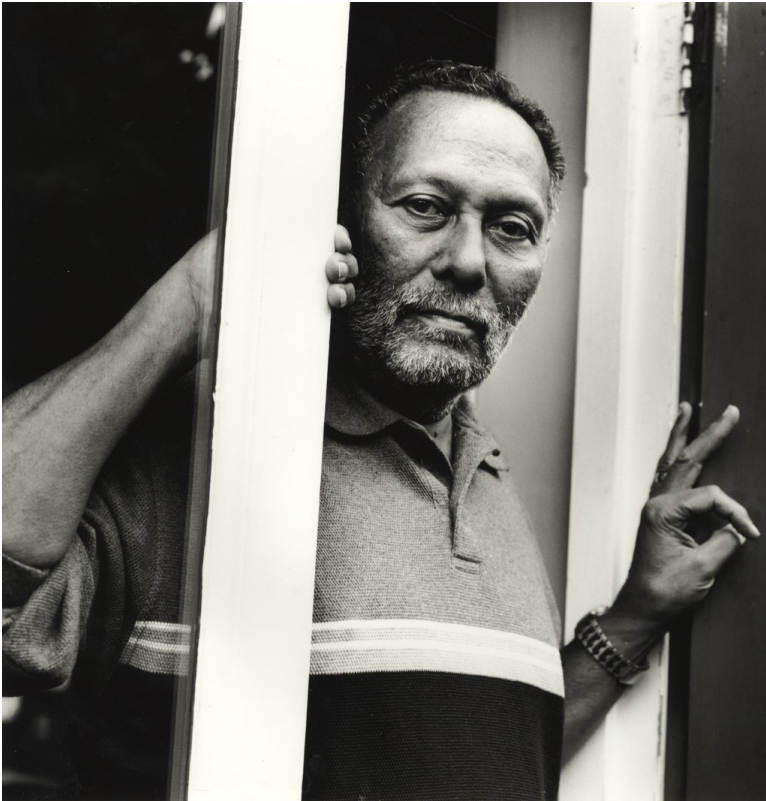


Figure 1: Stuart Hall. Photograph by Eamonn McCabe / Camera Press / Redux.

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